

[Jones Miller]

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Folk Stuff - Range Lore

Range-lore

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San Angelo, Texas.

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RANGE-LORE

Jones Miller moved with his parents from Gonzales to Belle County at the age of 12 years and worked on his father's ranch until he was a young man. Indians were numerous and Mr. Miller wonders yet how they escaped their savagery when neighbors suffered, all about them. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas

"The earlier days were made up of hardships and dangers," says Jones Miller, retired ranchman of Ozona, Texas. "People may say what they will about the good old days but I don't know if I would change back to them if I could. When we first came to Belle County we were all so afraid of the Indians that we hardly got a good night's sleep. How we escaped, when our neighbors all about suffered from their dirty work, 2 is more than I can understand yet. I well remember the morning when our nearest neighbor, which must have been some twelve miles away, came to my father's door on foot and wanted him to furnish horses and join in a search for his horses which had been stolen in the night. Father got out his best nags and they were soon off. Mother was worried all day, fearing the Indians might slay them all but they returned about sun-down with the horses and all were tired and hungry. They had come upon the horses staked out and taken them in

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the temporary absence of the Indians. Mother prepared supper which consisted of black coffee, broiled beef, and bread baked in a dutch oven on the coals in the fire place.

“Many horses were stolen all about us and I guess it was just pure accidental that we escaped these and other dirty deeds.

“When I was about 13 years old I attended a small country school in Belle County and remember the teacher looking out the window at one time and then looking back at the children in such fright that the smallest child in the room must have noticed his ashen face. He walked to the door and barely opened a crack large enough to peep out. Some of the children were close behind him. He was trying to be calm and not frighten us more than could be helped. When he turned back to give us instructions he cautioned us all to not be scared but to file out the door as quietly as possible and go in an opposite direction from where he had seen the Indians, telling us that the school house would be between us and the redskins until we could get to a certain home where protection and help could be had. That was the quietest bunch of kids I ever saw. If they breathed at all no one heard them. We went right on to the home he led us to, without being molested. We never know what their intention was as we heard of no ill effects from their being there.

“That was a bad part of the country for all kinds of thieves and outlaws and the better class of pioneers were at constant warfare with this lower element of people almost as much as with the Indians. One old cattle thief had “squatted” on some vacant land over in the timbered section and was just cleaning up on the cattle over the country. The citizens got together and sent him a note explaining what would happen to him if he was not out of the country by a certain time. He sent back the following reply: 'I am gathering my cattle to leave, if you think you can take me, come and get me.' He did leave and we all felt that we were rid of one of our worst enemies.

“After I was about grown I worked on another ranch near my father's and had many varied experiences. 4 “Lightning was one of the worst frights to the herd and caused the old time

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cowboy more hard rides than most any other reason for a stampede. Just as sure as a storm blew up and it lightened enough to play around on the cows' horns, away the old devils would go. The hardest ride I ever made was on one of these occasions. Those old longhorns ran about fourteen miles before we ever stopped them. We were certainly one tired, hungry bunch when we finally circled and circled them until they stopped. There were 2,000 in the herd and we started about 3:00 o'clock in the morning and rode without a bite of breakfast or lunch until about 3:00 o'clock that afternoon. Our horses were given out as well as ourselves and when the cook sent out a big seamless sack of boiled beef and corn bread we all expressed ourselves as enjoying the best meal of our lives and I still think of that as my best meal. The seamless sack was of homespun, woven around and around in one solid piece and generally used for grub sacks. The cattle were pretty well run down and grazed their way back to camps without further trouble.

"Any experienced cowboy knew better than to strike a match around camps after dark. We always rode off from the cattle to light our smokes. Singin' was our main pastime. A fellow would sing until he gave out, then turn off awhile to let some one else sing, then 5 come on again after awhile.

"I had a little dun colored striped legged Spanish horse that was the best I ever saw. He had more cow sense in a minute than most horses have in a life time. He would breast a cow into place and turn her every time. I penned an old fightin' cow with him once when every thing on the grounds had failed. He pushed her right on into that pen but when I got down and tried to rope her she made a lunge at me and over the fence I went at a speed that would have shamed any old longhorn. 'Why did you run so fast, Jones,' the boys yelled between laughs. "Cause I couldn't fly,' I says, and when I got on my horse again I stayed until I got that old heifer roped.

"Our boss said to us one day, 'Boys, you'd better be savin' your wages and buyin' up some of this cheap land, it's gona be worth something some of these days.' I was only 19 then, carefree and foolish, so I says, "Hell! this old poor land never will be worth a damn. All I

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want is a horse and saddle, a pair of chaps and a job.' Later on in life I thought well on what he had told me and began tryin' to do as he had advised. Probably that is one reason why me and the kid there, my wife, are enjoying the comforts of this good home here in Ozona today. It is steam heated and modern in every way.

"It hasn't all been roses comin' to this bit 6 of luxury- raisin' a family and all- but memories of the worst hardships are softened by the blessings which come with a well earned rest, so the kid and I are tryin' to enjoy the rest of the way as much as possible." Range-lore

Elizabeth Doyle

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jones Miller, Ozona, Texas, interviewed November 15, 1937.